

MICHIGAN'S LGBTQ+ NEWS SOURCE SINCE 1993

Between the Lines™

Finding JOY in the FIGHT

Why the ACLU's Jay Kaplan is still optimistic, even as a new Trump administration takes office

By Sarah Bricker Hunt

LIFE AFTER AFFIRMATIONS

Catching up with trailblazer Leslie Norlin-Thompson

OPERA'S BOLD QUEER FUTURE

How Detroit Opera's Yuval Sharon is redefining the stage

YOUR VOICE, YOUR SAFETY

LGBTQ+ activists share peaceful protest tips

Dr. Paul Benson's

**Be
Well**
Medical
Center

EST. 1980: THE ORIGINAL LGBTQ CLINIC IN MICHIGAN

The Right Choice for Your Health

Since 1980, Be Well Medical Center has delivered compassionate, patient-centered healthcare. Led by Dr. Benson and Dr. Bornstein, our dedicated team prioritizes your well-being. As credentialed HIV specialists, we offer PrEP and Doxy PEP. Our inclusive approach ensures top-quality care for all backgrounds and lifestyles.

We are thrilled to introduce Dr. Andrew Roberts, a dedicated pediatrician specializing in care for individuals from birth to 21 years. Our clinic is now a safe and inclusive space for LGBTQ youth seeking primary care.



Dr. Andrew Roberts with a Be Well Medical Center patient.

Four Locations



Be Well Medical Center

1964 11 Mile Rd,
Berkley, MI 48072
248-544-9300



Osborn Family Medical Clinic

13560 East McNichols Rd,
Detroit, MI 48205
248 544-9300



Community Health Awareness Group

1300 West Fort St.,
Detroit, MI 48226
313-963-3434 x118



Liv Well Clinic

5103 West Pierson St.
Flint, MI 48504
810-21-0605



Dr. Benson and Dr. Bornstein



- 4 5 Queer Things You Can Do Right Now-ish
- 6 Finding Joy in the Fight: Jay Kaplan's Decades of LGBTQ+ Advocacy in Michigan
- 8 Banking While Queer: Finding Your Financial Safe Space (Sponsored)
- 10 We're Still Here, We're Still Queer: What You Need to Know About Protesting in 2025
- 11 From Netflix to Ann Arbor: 'Nate' Brings Gender-Bending Comedy to UMS (Sponsored)
- 12 Creep of the Week: Trump and His Administration Has Declared War on Trans People. Fight Back.
- 13 The Scroll: Murderer Sentenced in 2023 Ashia Davis Killing
- 14 Where Are They Now? Leslie Ann Norlin-Thompson, Longest-Serving Executive Director of Affirmations
- 16 Rebirth in Action: How Renowned Opera Futurist Yuval Sharon Is Transforming the Art Form for Detroit Audiences
- 18 Winter Reads to Help You Ride Out the Chill
- 20 When a Casserole Is Not Enough: Building Healthcare Teams for a Tough Era

Page 6



Jay Kaplan. Photo: Andrew Potter

Delivered ~~Straight~~ to Your Mailbox

Support LGBTQ+ journalism and get BTL delivered to your door for just \$95/year or \$10/month.

WWW.PRIDESOURCE.COM/SUBSCRIBE

VOL. 3304 • JANUARY 23, 2025
ISSUE 1270

PRIDE SOURCE MEDIA GROUP
www.pridesource.com
Phone 734-263-1476

PUBLISHERS
Benjamin Jenkins
benjamin@pridesource.com

Publishers Emeritus: Jan Stevenson & Susan Horowitz

EDITORIAL
Editorial Director
Chris Azzopardi
chris@pridesource.com

Managing Editor
Sarah Bricker Hunt
sarah@pridesource.com

Staff Content Creator
Liam Clymer
liam@pridesource.com

CREATIVE
Cartoonist
Paul Berg

Graphic Designer
Sarah Wolf

Contributing Photographers
Andrew Potter, Andrew Cohen

ADVERTISING & SALES
sales@pridesource.com

Carolyn Cardenas
734-263-1476
carolyn@pridesource.com

Tim Powers
734-263-1475
tim@pridesource.com

Ann/Andy Cox
anncox@pridesource.com

National Advertising Representative
Rivendell Media, 212-242-6863

MEMBER OF
Michigan Press Association
National LGBT Media Association
National Gay & Lesbian Chamber
Q Syndicate

2022 AWARD WINNER

"Pride Source"
 Follow us @pridesource
 @pridesourcemedia
 Pride Source
 Email your op-eds to editor@pridesource.com
 Sign up online to receive our e-digest

Our rate cards are available online. All material appearing in Between The Lines is protected by federal copyright law and may not be reproduced in whole or part without the permission of the publishers. Between The Lines is supported by many fine advertisers, but we cannot accept responsibility for claims made by our advertisers, nor can we accept responsibility for materials provided by advertisers or their agents.

Copyright 2025

5 Queer Things You Can Do Right Now-ish

BY LIAM CLYMER

January doesn't have to be frumpy, babes! But when faced with the bitter bite of Michigan winter — and the second inauguration of Trump — I know releasing yourselves from the sweet embrace of a cozy blanket is easier said than done. Luckily for you, your favorite Detroit LGBTQ+ orgs are turning up the heat and giving you a chance to finish out January strong and future-forward. You can take your pick of two campy theater extravaganzas, work up a sweat at an LGBTQ+ self-defense workshop or freely ogle the hottest guys in town at Mr. Liberty Leather 2025.



Self-defense class at The Mix Studios. Courtesy photo

Learn Defense Techniques in a Safe Space

The folks over at The Mix Studios know that attacks on LGBTQ+ individuals are both a physical and mental threat. The studio's new queer self-defense workshop offers a comprehensive curriculum that addresses these safety concerns in detail. "The goal at The Mix Studios is to provide a safe space to learn skills and mental preparedness, verbal assertiveness as well as physical self-protection," Sarah Kreiner, owner of The Mix, tells BTL.

Kreiner added that the class's instructor is more than knowledgeable. "[Instructor] Heidi Sproul has been teaching self-defense for women and girls since 1990. She is also a psychotherapist who specializes in treating survivors of violence and has also treated those who commit violence. She understands the dynamics of sexual assault and other types of violence and works to empower students."

Jan. 26, 1-4 p.m., The Mix Studios (332 Harriet St., Ypsilanti). Sign up at the-mix-studios.com



"Fourteen Funerals" set model. Courtesy photo

Catch the Premiere of 'Fourteen Funerals'

The Purple Rose Theatre Company's next creative project serves as a reminder of the perseverance of love in unlikely circumstances. The darkly humorous "Fourteen Funerals" follows Sienna, a young woman who returns home after the passing of 14 of her family members she didn't know to give 14 eulogies she's unprepared for. Maybe it was fated that she would meet Millie, a peculiarly sunny employee of the Blissfield funeral home?

"The relationship between Sienna and Millie reminds us of those first feelings of love, especially those moments when it finds you unexpectedly," director Rhiannon Ragland tells BTL. "We tell a lot of different stories at the Purple Rose, but those common human experiences are always a core element we look for in anything we bring to our stage." Don't miss your chance to catch the Michigan premiere of this curiously beautiful story!

Feb. 6-March 9, various showtimes, The Purple Rose Theatre Company (137 Park St., Chelsea). Book tickets at purplerosetheatre.org.



Show Support For a New Mr. Liberty Leather

Leather, cute guys and a LGBTQ+ Detroit institution... need I say more?

All the above will be on hand at Detroit's premier LGBTQ+ leather showcase and competition, Mr. Liberty Leather. You may know Liberty Bar best for its drag brunches and bingos, but this two-day event brings out the bad in us all through a palpably seductive weekend of LGBTQ+ entertainment.

As for the contest portion, there will be pageant-style challenges, including an interview round, that will continue with scantily-clad competitors working the runway. The next icon will be announced by evening's end.

Jan. 31-Feb. 1, times vary across the weekend, Liberty Bar (85 N. Saginaw St., Pontiac). Further information can be found at bit.ly/40zjxwW.



Journey to 'Slurptopia'

Plant Ant's latest production is a campy, clever critique of modern-day class dynamics and maximalist culture that's not to be missed.

Set in the vibrant world of "Slurptopia," the show explores a society where "slurp" — the freedom to follow one's impulses — is the most coveted resource. While citizens strive to slurp freely, the upper class wields this power as a tool of control and manipulation.

Though character names like "Slurp Goblin" and "Dry Lord" are hilariously absurd, the humor serves as a sharp contrast to the production's deeper, thought-provoking commentary.

Jan. 24 and 25, 8 p.m., *The Planet Ant Black Box* (2357 Caniff St., Hamtramck). Snag a seat at bit.ly/4hgg1gh.

Timeless Pieces For Years To Come

GIORGIO CONTI
FINE JEWELRY & TIMEPIECES

22637 Woodward Avenue, Ferndale Michigan 48220
gconti.com | (248) 569-6747



Honor a Decade of Stand with Trans

Ten years is nothing to scoff at — especially when the most popular current political strategy seems to be focused on threatening our protections and politicizing our lives. It's incredibly important in this era that the community can turn to the determined and provenly reliable Michigan LGBTQ+ organization Stand with Trans.

In order to properly celebrate the landmark achievements made in the org's last decade of service, Stand with Trans will host the "Love Transcends" gala on May 17. With dinner, entertainment, drinks and a silent auction, the community rallying event is representative of the sense of love and joy Stand with Trans has come to be known for.

Tickets are expected to sell out quickly. Make sure to stake out your spot as a part of this pivotal moment in Stand with Trans' history.

May 17, 7 p.m., *Henry Ford Health Pistons Performance Center* (6201 2nd Ave., Detroit). Secure your spot at bit.ly/4jdAjZJ.

WINNER ★ 5 TONY AWARDS INCLUDING BEST MUSICAL

Kimberly Akimbo

ON SALE NOW
Mar 11-23 • Fisher Theatre
BroadwayInDetroit.com

Groups (10+) BroadwayInDetroitGroups@ATGEntertainment.com
(subject: Kimberly Akimbo)

Finding Joy in the Fight: Jay Kaplan’s Decades of LGBTQ+ Advocacy in Michigan

Why he’s still optimistic, even as a new Trump administration takes office



Jay Kaplan in his ACLU Michigan office. Photo: Andrew Potter

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

In the darkest days of Michigan’s LGBTQ+ history, when marriage equality seemed impossible and discrimination protections were a distant dream, Jay Kaplan was fighting. He still is. For more than two decades in his role as staff attorney for the ACLU of Michigan’s LGBT Project, Kaplan has been at ground zero of nearly every recent major victory — and setback — in the state’s long march toward equality.

“Why is he so impactful? It’s his wisdom,

which he shares generously, and the nuggets of knowledge that he drops when he hosts and facilitates community workshops and when he shows up in community spaces... truly, what he does for the community is life-changing,” says Jeynce Poindexter, executive director of Trans Sistās of Colar and a longtime colleague and friend who has worked with Kaplan for over a decade on various initiatives, including the 2022 amendment to the Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act that added LGBTQ+ discrimination protections to the state constitution.

Speaking to Kaplan today about his decades of LGBTQ+ advocacy in Michigan, it feels as though he might have been born for this role. But becoming one of the country’s most influential civil rights attorneys wasn’t exactly what he had in mind growing up in Southfield in the 1960s and ’70s.

“It wasn’t my plan to become a lawyer from an early age, but I think sometimes, and I’m generalizing, when you grow up in a Jewish family, with Jewish parents, their aspiration, particularly for a son, is to either be a doctor or a lawyer,” Kaplan recalls with

a smile. “I knew I didn’t want to do anything with medicine because I just didn’t have that stomach for the human body or blood, so I ended up going to law school.”

After earning his psychology degree from the University of Michigan and attending Wayne State University Law School, Kaplan discovered a passion for public interest law while volunteering at a legal aid clinic representing indigent tenants in eviction proceedings. This early career experience led to a 13-year tenure at Michigan Protection & Advocacy Services (now Disability

Rights Michigan), where he established a groundbreaking HIV/AIDS advocacy program during the height of the AIDS epidemic in Michigan. “At that time, for many people living with HIV or having AIDS, it was a death sentence,” Kaplan says. “We focused on helping people get on social security disability as well as doing simple documents for them about medical care so their wishes would be preserved, as well as wills for people.”

Working inside the HIV/AIDS crisis deeply influenced Kaplan’s path toward LGBTQ+ advocacy. “The epidemic was disproportionately impacting the gay community,” he explains. “I saw, firsthand, the discriminatory policies and the lack of legal protections and the need to recognize same-sex relationships under the law in order to protect people’s wishes who were dying.”

When the ACLU of Michigan created its LGBT Project in 2001, Kaplan knew it was his next step. “I was very content with where I was working, but I always thought if the ACLU of Michigan ever started their own LGBTQ project, that would be something I would love to be a part of,” he says. The project was initially funded for just two years, but under Kaplan’s leadership, it has become a long-standing cornerstone of LGBTQ+ advocacy in Michigan.

The project’s creation was timely, coming at a moment when Michigan had taken a conservative turn. “The governor’s office, the Michigan Supreme Court, the legislature and certain groups like the American Family Association, which had a location in Michigan — the ACLU thought it’d be important to have a project like this,” Kaplan explains.

Under his leadership over the past 24 years, the project has achieved significant victories, including marriage equality and state civil rights protections. He was also instrumental in ACLU’s landmark case, R.G. & G.R. Harris Funeral Homes v. EEOC & Aimee Stephens, representing Stephens to secure federal civil rights protections against employment discrimination for LGBTQ+ people.

“I am eternally grateful for his friendship, for his leadership, for his input throughout the state of Michigan, for his footprint and advocacy,” says Poindexter. She especially appreciates his accessibility despite his prominence in the movement for the community and for her on a deeply personal level. “Jay has been there for me personally outside of work in ways that I would not think many white men would be for me as a Black trans woman.”

“To see someone so committed to change, it is beautiful because you just don’t get that, especially in nonprofit work,” Poindexter reflects. “The heart and the grit and the fabric

of what he’s made of is to serve.”

Emme Zanolli, director of advocacy and civic engagement at Equality Michigan, echoes Poindexter’s sentiments. Zanolli regularly works alongside Kaplan on advocacy projects throughout the state. “Jay is a tireless advocate,” she notes. “I really don’t think his passion is rivaled. But above all that, he’s just a really good person. Everything about him conveys how approachable and compassionate he is. He makes our movement and the spaces we hold safer for everyone.”

Looking ahead to life after the November 2024 election, in which Michigan Democrats lost their House majority and Donald Trump was reelected, Kaplan acknowledges that

“I think probably the strongest antidote to all of this is for us to find the joyful things in our life... You have to have that balance.”

progress isn’t always linear. “I guess if you ask me right now, I would say I’m surprised that with all the progress we’ve made, there is this great concern that some of this progress could very well be pushed back,” he notes. “Anytime you have a civil rights movement, you make progress and then there’s an effort to try to push back.”

Kaplan acknowledges there are many current challenges facing the LGBTQ+ community, particularly regarding transgender rights. Still, he remains steadfast in his commitment, and encourages the community to reflect on what we still have — the fruits of hard work and dedication that will continue delivering results for the queer community. “What we have to do is we have to stick together and we have to stand up and we have to raise our voices and we have to think outside of the box,” he says. “Michigan went from being a terrible state at one point, to being in a much better place

See Jay Kaplan, page 21



SUBARU

@Hodges...

SDF-34 **OUTBACK®**



Come See Our Inventory

HODGES SUBARU
Metro Detroit's "Subaru-Only Dealer"

21205 Woodward Ave • Ferndale • MI • 48220
248.547.8800 • www.hodgessubaru.com

HOURS: **MONDAY** - 9:00A.M. - 7:00P.M.
TUESDAY - FRIDAY - 9:00A.M. - 6:00P.M.
SATURDAY - 10:00A.M. - 2:00P.M.

EVERYDAY!

EXCELLENT SERVICE • OUTSTANDING SELECTION • FANTASTIC PRICES....

The Senior Alliance 

Being a caregiver is rewarding

Being a caregiver is **challenging**

Being a caregiver is **valuable**

Being a caregiver is **stressful**

Supporting you as a caregiver.

As a caregiver, you are helping your aging parent, spouse, or friend with tasks both big and small. At The Senior Alliance, we understand the responsibility and compassion that caregiving requires—and we’re here to offer our support.

Our Caregiving Haven is the one-stop source for guidance, tools, and resources you need to **feel empowered as a caregiver**. Get the support you deserve by visiting caregivinghaven.org or by calling **734.722.2830**.

Banking While Queer: Finding Your Financial Safe Space

Genisys Credit Union shares tips for securing your financial future

BY JORDYN BRADLEY

Money is so often thought of as a taboo conversation topic, but let's face it: Money makes the world go 'round. And in the LGBTQ+ community, being financially set might mean more than having enough for bills and groceries.

It might mean taking extra steps to ensure a romantic partner is taken care of financially if anything happens to you, or setting aside extra funding for family planning or gender-affirming care.

But roughly half (48.15%) of queer adults say they are "financially unwell," as opposed to one quarter (25.7%) of the general public, according to the Human Rights Campaign. And approximately 30% of LGBTQ+ adults say they have experienced discrimination while accessing financial services.

It's important to feel financially secure and financially literate, while also knowing you don't have to do it alone. Genisys Credit Union, an Auburn Hills-based credit union that has made Forbes' annual "America's Best-In-State Credit Unions" list for the fifth consecutive year, recently shared tips with BTL to help you not only save more this year, but to feel more confident (and comfortable) doing so.

Build an emergency savings account

Mark Reuter, marketing manager of Genisys Credit Union, stresses the importance of having money in a savings account that you aren't regularly touching.

"It's important for someone to have money set aside in a separate account that they're not relying on for their day-to-day and monthly needs, so that when an unexpected expense does pop up, it's much easier for them to cover it and not have to rely on credit cards and go into debt for it," Reuter tells BTL.

Genisys also allows their members to put personalized names to their savings accounts, called a You Name It! Savings Account, which can help to picture exactly what you're saving for, especially if it's something large, like a new car, a vacation or a healthcare expense.

"Naming your savings account makes it front and center, and serves as a reminder of what you are saving for and that your goal is attainable," says Heather Pizzala, vice president of marketing at Genisys.

Save a little at a time

Setting your future self up for success is also something you should start doing as soon as you're able, says Reuter.

"The earlier you're able to even start saving, the better," he says, as it gets you into the routine of doing it.

But financial experts also know saving can feel daunting, especially when living paycheck to paycheck. Pizzala recommends putting aside a small amount from each paycheck, so as not to feel overwhelmed by it.

"Even \$20 adds up," she says.

Consider swapping to a credit union

If you're not already banking with a credit union, it might be worth considering a switch. Traditionally, credit unions have higher savings rates, lower loan rates and fewer fees, says Reuter.

In some cases, like with Genisys, they are also more involved in supporting their communities, making them better places to work, live and play. Often Genisys can be found showing support at local community and Pride events.



The Genisys team at Ferndale Pride. Courtesy photo

Earn extra money with a high-yield checking account

A checking account that pays a dividend on the balance, like the Genisys Credit Union Genius Checking Account, can also help you earn extra money just by keeping your money in one place. This high-yield checking account pays 6.75% APY, up to a \$7,500 balance, with the only two requirements of signing up for e-statements and making 10 debit transactions of \$5 or more per month.

"If you maintain a \$7,500 daily balance every month, that equates to about \$500 through the year that you're earning. It's extra money we're giving you. It goes right back into that account each month as a deposit," says Reuter.

And if you've been contemplating merging funds with a partner, the extra money earned from a high-yield savings account might be something to consider. Still, be sure to weigh all of your options and talk with a financial advisor about any questions or concerns.

Banking at your fingertips can simplify your budgeting

Mobile banking and budgeting apps, like those from your financial institution, the You Need a Budget (YNAB) app or Rocket Money, can alert you following every transaction, so you'll never have to wonder about your balance. They can also help you detect potential fraudulent activity and turn off cards if fraud is suspected.

Cut down on subscription services

Monitoring your account in mobile banking and turning on transaction alerts can also highlight what you are spending money on, even when you forget about it. Pizzala emphasizes the importance of reviewing your subscriptions and cutting down on ones you aren't frequently using, or eliminating some altogether.

"A strategy some people have is to immediately turn off auto-renewal as soon as you sign up for a subscription. This will force you to really review the subscription at renewal," she says. "Ask yourself, 'Do I really want it again? Do I need it again? Is there a different level of subscription that I want?'" says Pizzala.

Also, if you're in a new relationship, you probably don't need Grindr Unlimited anymore. Just saying.

Remember to build credit low and slow

When using a credit card, Reuter and Pizzala caution against paying for large purchases with it immediately and overwhelming yourself with a large balance. Paying off the balance each month also helps to eliminate stress in the long run.

"Unfortunately, it takes longer to fix debt than it does to just stay on the right path from the beginning," says Reuter.

Don't feel ashamed to ask for help

Financial literacy doesn't happen overnight, but financial experts are there to answer any questions you may have. Many credit unions, like Genisys, have financial advisors available to call or visit for an in-person appointment. There is also a chat option on their website and helpful resources, like budget management tools, ebooks, webinars and more.

"We want to make sure your money is working for you, regardless of if you're a member with us or not," says Pizzala.

Money can be a scary topic, but financial wellness is all about asking questions and researching what works best for your specific circumstance.

Bank with a financial partner that supports you

As queer people, it can feel daunting to go into a financial institution not knowing what you'll be met with. The biggest piece of money advice Pizzala gives is to ensure you're feeling accepted and supported wherever you bank, your concerns are being considered and that all your questions are being thoroughly answered.

"You should feel comfortable on your financial journey," says Pizzala. "We make sure our members and the community are aware that Genisys raises our hands to say we are here to support you. We want to help you. We understand there may be reservations and concerns of what you're met with, but we are a safe space."

This article is a sponsored editorial produced in collaboration with Genisys Credit Union. Between The Lines's LGBTQ+ journalism is made possible with the support and partnership of advertisers like Genisys. To learn more, visit genisyscu.org.

More Money, Less Rules!



Earn 6.75%
APY*

**GENIUS HIGH
YIELD CHECKING**

+ Debit Rewards

**A Checking Account that
can Pay Nearly \$500 a Year!**

Make 10 or more debit transactions of at least \$5 during the month

Enroll in eStatements

INSURED BY NCUA



29 Southeast Michigan branches, find more at genisyscu.org.

*APY is Annual Percentage Yield. Paid on balances up to \$7,500 each month if requirements met. Balances over \$7,500 will earn .05%APY. The earned per year amount shown is calculated by a full year at the maximum \$7,500 daily balance. Your results may vary as your daily account balance fluctuates. Transactions that are pending on your account, and have not posted as of the end of the monthly qualification cycle will not count as a qualifying transaction for that cycle.

GENISYS
CREDIT UNION

We're Still Here, We're Still Queer

What you need to know about safe protesting in 2025

BY LIAM CLYMER

In many ways, 2025 feels like 2017 all over again. Millions of Americans are engaging in protest as Donald Trump resumes the presidency, including local LGBTQ+ advocates rallying in support of queer rights and against political forces pledging to fight against them.

Protest has the power to create meaningful change, but it's critical to prioritize safety in order to maintain control and ensure your ability to fight another day. Whether this is your first protest or hundredth, LGBTQ+ advocates told BTL their best tips, so anyone can make their voices heard without harm.

Pre-event planning

Research the event and understand its goals.

The circumstances of any given protest are always going to be different than the last. That's why Julisa Abad, head of local social justice organization TeamAbad, said it's important that you should diligently research any event you plan on attending.

She said that aspects such as location, religious affiliation and political climate can dictate how strong the response to protest will be. Abad said that it's important to not just know what situation you'll be entering into, but what voices will be raised against yours.

"I always like to be educated when I go to a protest; there's always going to be people that obviously don't agree, but a protest doesn't have to equate to negativity or violence," she said. "Even if I don't agree, I like to hear why someone has a different perspective so that I can educate myself on something that I don't know or so that I can see how I can change their way of thinking."

"I have my statistics and facts in

order and I can make it a teachable moment for somebody that might not be as educated in my cause," Abad added.

Practice self-care and employ practices to protect your identity.

Knowing what event you plan to go to is only one piece of the puzzle — it's just as important to take care of your well-being.

Abad noted that ideally everyone at demonstrations would be treated with the same level of respect. But since that's not the case — especially for trans people of color — she said deliberate preparations to protect wellbeing are necessary.

"Sometimes we have to recognize that not everyone has our best interests at heart," she said, "and though sometimes things aren't fair, we want to live to fight another day — educate yourself on what your limitations are."

"I always say, don't take anything or wear anything that would give them cause to say that your intentions are violent or aggressive, even if they're not," she added. "I get that, yes, we should be able to wear and say whatever we want. But the reality is people have their biases [and] it might not be safe for you."

Public health advocate Jason Rosenberg is a member of AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) in New York, a grassroots organization with the goal of maintaining awareness, creating change and supporting individuals with AIDS through direct action, and a co-founding member of PrEP4Al. He said that clothing could also be used to protect identity — allowing individuals to protest with peace of mind and without risk to personal or financial backlash.

Rosenberg notes that doxxing has become a concern, especially inside the Free Palestine movement, impacting protestors on college campuses and beyond.

"A lot of times, people have used PPE equipment such as anti-Covid masks to protect their face when they're out in the streets just to ensure that they do not get doxxed," he said. "That [doxxing] could harm people's workplaces, their incomes or, obviously, their physical safety could be at risk."

Pack the right essentials.

Water, snacks, proper clothes, a fully charged phone and first aid supplies should be on your checklist for any protest. But Rosenberg also emphasized the importance of carrying ID — and exactly what kind.

"It's always good to have your ID on you just to ensure that you have it in case you need it," Rosenberg said. "Have your phone on you, but do not have face ID connected to it."

According to Rosenberg, face ID could spell trouble for cops who don't mind stepping over personal boundaries. Depending on your area, police may feel emboldened to pressure you into unlocking your phone with face ID. Generally, a digit-based unlock code is seen as better protected under your rights.

"Different police jurisdictions could use [face ID], so it's really important to turn that off," he added.

During the protest

Practice situational awareness.

Stay alert to surroundings and note emergency exits. When in the high-energy environment that's often found in protesting, it can be easy to lose your bearings. The "OODA Loop" can help combat this. The acronym stands for "Observe, Orient, Decide, Act" and provides an easy to remember framework to utilize in emergency situations.

Observe: Pinpoint any danger and observe your surroundings

Orient: Take in your current location and decide where you need to go from there

Decide: Determine a course of



Activist Jason Rosenberg, center, near Chelsea Piers in New York City on June 3, 2024 protesting Outright International's gala and their silence on Gaza. Photo: Melodie Jeng

action that minimizes risk

Act: Move forward with your action while keeping aware of your environment

Use the buddy system for accountability and support.

As a part of your planning, it's crucial to establish an emergency contact outside of whatever event you're attending. Give this contact an outline of your plan (when and how you'll arrive and leave) and how to assist in an emergency situation.

But while you are on the ground, Rosenberg said having a buddy is a must for your physical welfare. "Always have at least one protest buddy with you so that you can keep an eye on each other and ensure safety both from escalators outside of the protest, but also from the police and other state violence," he said.

Engage peacefully and avoid escalation if tensions rise.

Wearing clothes to make you feel safe and keep your identity protected is a step in the right direction, but even then, you may be a target of escalation — knowing how to respond ensures that your message won't be drowned out, but instead resonate effectively.

When faced with escalation, remain calm and keep your voice steady. Avoid any provocative behavior that may lead law enforcement to believe you have intent to be violent. But in the case that all else fails, simply remove yourself from the situation — you can't be targeted unfairly if you aren't there.

Rosenberg said that protest is a

See **Protest Tips**, page 15

From Netflix to Ann Arbor: ‘Nate’ Brings Gender-Bending Comedy to UMS

Award-winning performer Natalie Palamides brings her provocative exploration of masculinity to Ann Arbor

BY JORDYN BRADLEY

Natalie Palamides considers herself a “clowner” — a type of comedian whose sets rely on audience interaction and engagement, the use of props and a certain level of absurdity. That absurdity might entail wrestling audience members (after they’ve signed a waiver, of course), or a romantic on-stage relationship with a mannequin.

The University of Michigan’s University Musical Society (UMS) is excited for Palamides to bare all — or mostly all — from Feb. 5-9 at the Arthur Miller Theater in her upcoming performance of “Nate – A One-Man Show,” written and performed by Palamides in drag.

“This work in particular is featured as part of our ‘No Safety Net’ series, which features provocative theater productions that foster timely conversations around topical social themes. It will be a really fun one, not to mention the pure talent of Natalie Palamides generates a bit of excitement as it is,” says Lilian Varner, UMS marketing and media relations manager.

Throughout the show, Nate — who is Palamides with fake facial hair, chest hair and genitalia — is dealing with a breakup and is forced to uncover themes of toxic masculinity and sexual politics. The character learns about consent between soda belches and spewing profanities, while the audience is left to ponder the nuances of masculinity and observe the different ways humanity can act and react. Palamides says her goal was to showcase a character with equal parts “grotesqueness and vulnerability.”

“My intent was to make it as confusing as possible,” Palamides tells BTL.

Palamides began workshopping the show concept in 2017, around the same time multiple women came out against Harvey Weinstein for sexual abuse. When the #MeToo movement gained attention and the conversation about consent became more prevalent, Palamides wanted to talk about it, too, but have those conversations in person, versus online.

“I thought, ‘What’s the perfect place to have these conversations in the room with other people, and where does that happen?’ And it’s in the theater,” she says.

“And what do I do? I make theater. So I have to bring it to my audience.”

And while the character of Nate might be flawed, annoying and even gross, he also has very real emotions and realizations, much like anyone else. Palamides says she hopes to show that when you “crack someone open,” you just might find something relatable.

“The goal of the show is to bring everyone in the room together. And with the Nate character, I’ve always been drawn to this juxtaposition of him. It’s always really fun to play with his tough exterior, and then these moments where he lets his guard down. Because everyone’s a human being and everyone has these different shields up for different reasons, and people wear themselves in the world a certain way because of their lived experiences and how they’ve been taught they should behave to be accepted or received a certain way,” says Palamides.

She premiered the play at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in 2018, where it won a Total Theatre Award for Innovation and Experimentation. The show gained the attention of Amy Poehler’s production company, Paper Kite

Productions, which eventually led to a Netflix special of the same name in December 2020. Palamides performed as Nate in a few settings across the U.K., Ireland and New York before the COVID-19 pandemic, but this will be the first time Palamides has performed as Nate in five years.

“I’ve really got to get in shape. Nate has abs, but Nate definitely doesn’t have abs now, if you know what I mean,” says Palamides.

Still, Palamides says she is excited to perform as Nate again and to visit Michigan for the first time, even if it’s in the middle of winter. And UMS is just as thrilled for people to come see the performance.

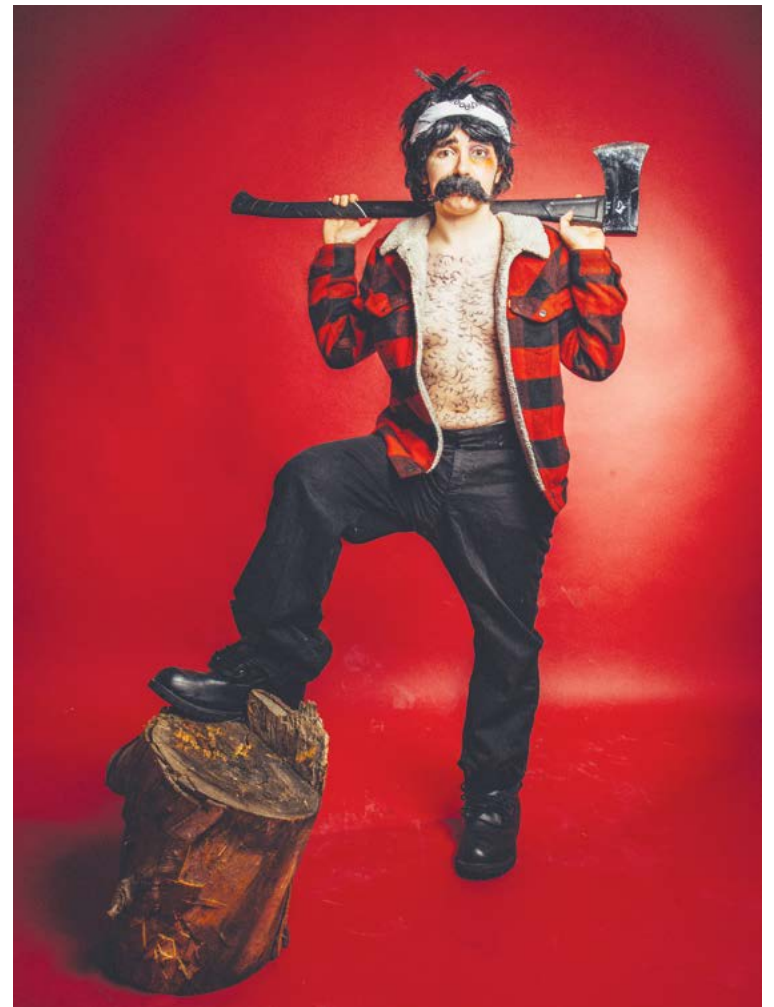
“The UMS team is really excited about the performance of ‘Nate,’ and we’re especially excited to see how it plays out with our local Ann Arbor audiences across six different shows. This is a rare opportunity to see the show live, as it’s not being presented anywhere else,” says Varner.

Palamides is also looking forward to mixed takeaways from the audience. Palamides says a big part of the show is exploring Nate’s masculinity and the exterior that he wears alongside him, but she also acknowledges that everyone’s takeaway from the show can, and probably will, be different.

“I didn’t set out to make a statement about what is right and what is wrong. I more set out to get people to engage in face-to-face conversations with the people they came with afterward,” says Palamides.

UMS is sure that audience members will be surprised and entertained by the show, and that people should “expect the unexpected.”

“‘Nate’ is a very comedic one-man show with a ton of audience interaction that presents a new way



Natalie Palamides as Nate. Photo: Nick Rasmussen

to reflect on some serious and hard-to-talk-about issues. Ultimately, it’s a unique take on stand-up comedy that makes fun of the exact kind of men who have consistently dominated the stand-up comedy scene,” says Varner.

Plus, Palamides wants people to laugh.

“That’s the goal. Even though the subject matter is sometimes serious, it’s a comedy,” she says. “It’s silly, you’ll walk away laughing... hopefully.”

For the remainder of the 2024-2025 season, UMS is looking

forward to other performances and guest appearances, including live music, gaming workshops, dance ensembles, film concerts and more.

This article is a sponsored editorial produced in collaboration with University Musical Society. Between The Line’s LGBTQ+ journalism is made possible with the support and partnership of advertisers like UMS. To learn more about UMS and other upcoming performances, check out their schedule at ums.org/season.

Trump and His Administration Has Declared War on Trans People. Fight Back.



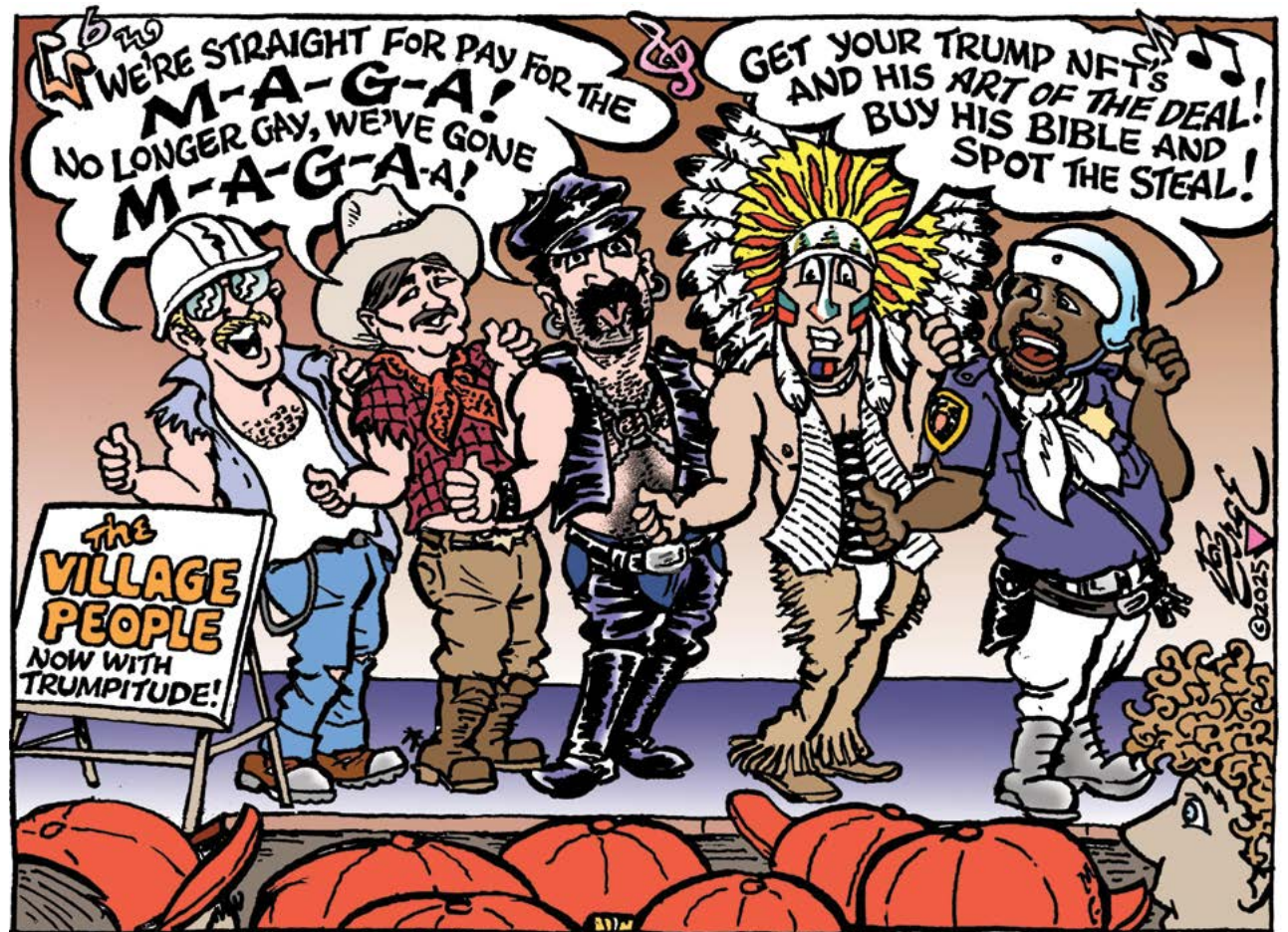
BY D'ANNE WITKOWSKI

Well, it's happening. As I write this, the absolute worst president of my lifetime (and quite possibly ever!) is being sworn in to do the job again. At least I'm assuming it's happening. I'm not watching it on TV because I don't hate myself.

There are many reasons to fear a second Trump Administration even for those who voted for him because they know nothing about the Republican Party platform and mostly voted for Trump because of racism or some absolutely delusional idea that somehow with Trump in charge they will get more money in their pockets. And they're right about that last part, IF they're already rich.

To show how serious he is that he supports the common (white) man, Trump's first order of business after being sworn in was to put a stop to wage theft, significantly lower gas prices, and cut egg prices to \$10 a dozen (keep in mind that Trump thinks they cost \$50 a dozen because he's never been grocery shopping in his life).

Haha. Just kidding. His first order of business is to make the lives of transgender Americans worse.



critical for equality for nonbinary people.”

That's going to make it very hard for transgender people to travel outside of the country, never mind dealing with all of the other federal documents that include gender identity markers.

He's also going to ban transgender people from the military as a “cost saving measure.” See, Trump, who is proudly ignorant, thinks that trans people join the military to get free gender affirmation surgery. Transgender service members couldn't possibly be dedicated to serving their country. Nope, it's that sweet free top surgery they're after.

Obviously that is not true. But I have to say, even if it was true, who cares? I mean, serving in the military is not exactly an easy job. In fact it's a job that most Americans do not want to do, including Trump. So if someone wants

to serve in the military, the least we can do for them is to make sure they get the medical care they need.

He's also going to ban transgender women in sports. “[Trump] has argued this measure ensures fairness in competition despite a lack of evidence supporting widespread advantages for transgender athletes,” The Advocate reports. “Advocacy groups have called such a ban harmful and rooted in misinformation. Despite the exceedingly small number of trans athletes who participate

in competitive sports, Republicans have made targeting them a priority.”

It's a ridiculous thing to focus on, considering how many real problems desperately need to be addressed. And I hurt for the trans athletes who are being targeted. It must feel so awful to have the most powerful leader in the world demonizing you. It's truly sick and depraved.

So, what can you do?

If you are trans, there are many resources available such as the Trans Lifeline (877-565-8860) and The Trevor Project. GLAAD has many more resources available on its website. If you are in crisis, please ask for help. It's a very hard thing to do, but you are worthy of support and deserve happiness.

If you're not trans, you can donate to the above organizations so that they can continue to offer much-needed resources.

You can also be an ally and advocate. And I mean be an advocate in an intentional way. It's not enough in these dire times to be passively supportive, i.e. “I'm fine with trans people” or “I don't have a problem with trans people.” While certainly better than being anti-trans, it doesn't materially change things for trans people who are fighting for their lives right now. It doesn't protect them. It doesn't give them hope. You can do more than the bare minimum.

Advocates for Trans Equality has a very good guide to being an ally. I highly recommend you read it and take it to heart. In fact, even if you are trans, it couldn't hurt to read it, especially if you have people in your life who you would like to ask for support.

Above all, don't give up and don't give in. We need each other more than ever right now. Support each other, love each other, and help each other get through each day.

It's a ridiculous thing to focus on, considering how many real problems desperately need to be addressed.

According to The Advocate, “One of Trump's first executive orders will require federal agencies to define sex as strictly either male or female. This directive will eliminate recognition of transgender and nonbinary identities at the federal level, barring individuals from updating gender markers on passports and other federal documents that currently allow for ‘X’ gender markers. The Biden administration had allowed such updates, viewing them as

Murderer Sentenced in 2023 Ashia Davis Killing

.....

A Michigan judge sentenced Carlos Lamar Scotland, 19, to between 17 and 30 years in prison for the murder of Ashia Davis, a 36-year-old Black transgender woman. Scotland pleaded guilty to second-degree murder and a felony firearm count for killing Davis, who was found dead with a single gunshot wound to her head in a Highland Park hotel on June 1, 2023.

Security footage from the hotel showed Scotland entering Davis's room at 10:57 p.m. and fleeing at 11:16 p.m. on the night of the murder. While prosecutors

successfully tied Scotland to the killing, they were unable to establish a clear motive for the crime.

Trans activist Julisa Abad shared her grief during her witness impact statement: "Most people's memories of their loved ones are good memories. The last memory that I have is seeing my friend on the floor outside of the hotel corner room with blood streaming all over the floor."

Abad addressed broader issues of violence against trans women of color with The Advocate, noting, "The sad reality is, particularly in the Black and brown community, men that are enamored of trans women and cannot be themselves have to resort to loving us in private and killing us in public [rather] than have anybody know their association with us."



Ashia Davis. Courtesy photo

Whitmer Signs Name and Gender Marker Change Bills

.....

Gov. Gretchen Whitmer signed a package of bills on Jan. 17 that removes barriers for Michigan residents seeking name changes and codifies protections for transgender and non-binary individuals updating their identification documents.

The legislation, including House Bills 5300 and 5303, cleared the House in December on a 56-0 vote after Republicans walked out of the chamber in protest of unrelated bills, refusing to vote on the package. The new laws eliminate requirements for fingerprinting and public notice of court dates for non-marriage name changes. They also enshrine existing policies allowing residents to select an "X" gender marker on driver's licenses and state IDs and remove the requirement for proof of surgery to change sex markers on birth certificates.

Advocates say the changes will make the process more accessible and humane for transgender residents who previously faced costly legal hurdles and assumptions of fraud when seeking to align their documents with their identity.

AOC Urges Dems to 'Throw a Damn Punch' After Anti-Trans Bill Passes House

.....

Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (AOC) urged Democrats to show strength on LGBTQ+ issues following the House's passage of HR

28, an anti-trans sports bill, on Jan. 14. The bill, which would block transgender athletes from participating in women's academic sports programs, passed with a 218-206 vote.

Speaking at a press briefing, AOC argued that Democrats can win on trans rights if they're willing to "throw a damn punch" and confront Republicans directly. She emphasized that people respond to strength and suggested that some Democrats have struggled with trans

issues due to a lack of confidence in their stance.

The congresswoman criticized the bill and recent anti-trans bathroom policies, particularly those targeting Rep. Sarah McBride, the first trans woman elected to the House. AOC characterized these Republican initiatives as harmful to all girls, not just transgender students, and called for Democrats to take a more assertive stance on LGBTQ+ rights.

Remembering Jack Gorro, Black Media Trailblazer

.....

Jack Gorro, a pioneering force in Southeast Michigan's LGBTQ+ community, died in early January. As editor-in-chief of Kick Magazine from 1994-2000, Jack shaped the voice of LGBT+ African American media across the Midwest. His journey began in the early '90s with the Men of Color Motivational Group before leading LGBT Detroit's founding publication. Jack leaves behind his husband David Garner and a legacy of mentorship that helped build LGBT Detroit into what it is today.

Meet 'Queer Slashers' Author Peter Marra

.....

Join Wayne State University professor Peter Marra at Sidetrack Bookshop in Royal Oak on Feb. 18 for a fascinating look at horror's queer legacy. His new book "Queer Slashers" explores how iconic characters like Norman Bates and Leatherface reflect gender nonconformity, tracing the subgenre's LGBTQ+ connections from the 1920s to today. In conversation with bookseller Cate, Marra will discuss how modern queer filmmakers are transforming the slasher tradition. Visit sidetrackbooks.com for details.

Queer Community Mourns David Lynch

.....

David Lynch, the visionary filmmaker behind "Twin Peaks" and "Mulholland Drive," died on Jan. 16 at age 78. His exploration of otherness deeply resonated with LGBTQ+ artists, particularly through transgender FBI Chief Denise Bryson (David Duchovny) in "Twin Peaks: The Return." Lynch's character's defense of Denise — "fix your hearts or die" — became a powerful trans rallying cry, showing what director Jane Schoenbrun called "another world of love and danger."



David Lynch. Courtesy photo



WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Leslie Ann Norlin-Thompson, Longest-Serving Executive Director of Affirmations

BY LIAM CLYMER

Much like Detroit, the city she hails from, Leslie Ann Norlin-Thompson's story is one of resilience. When faced with societal shame in relation to her identity, Norlin-Thompson rose from her

lowest moment to ensure others in her community wouldn't have to go through what she did.

Whether it be through her revitalizing work as the longest-serving executive director of Affirmations or her recent activism through the Campaign for Southern Equality, Norlin-Thompson is an inspiring example of how to live a life of service.

What sparked your interest in advocacy work?

I sat in my car in the garage with the engine running, only to be interrupted by my roommate coming home unexpectedly in the middle of the work day. The universe works in mysterious ways. I was 25 and had just finished my first relationship with a woman. I had so much shame and fear that suicide seemed my only option.

Fast forward to me beginning my third relationship with a woman at the age of 35. She was 46 and I was her first female partner. She found an ad for Affirmations on the back page of Metro Times and wanted to attend the women's support group. I thought she was nuts. I was running the Boys and Girls Club of Troy and I knew if anyone on my board found out I was gay I knew I would be fired.

In November 1992, she talked me into going to a meeting. From there, my relationship with Affirmations moved forward at warp speed. My partner, Karla Handley, and I began facilitating the women's rap group within a year of us walking through the doors for the first time. That first year we attended every group we possibly could... including a six-week coming-out program. Well, come out I did!

In no particular order, we also designed and facilitated an eight-week couples-in-touch group, began a couples support group, took the speakers training and began speaking at businesses and schools, volunteered on fundraising events, sat on committees and Karla even ended up on the board of directors. And as I expected within a few years of me coming out, my career

with the Boys and Girls Club was over. I spent the next five years at Camp Fire Boys and Girls where I was out and proud and so gay! Karla and I were still heavily involved with Affirmations and also got involved in several other organizations around the community such as MOHR (Michigan Organization for Human Rights), MAPP (Midwest AIDS Prevention Program), APM (AIDS Partnership Michigan), Triangle Foundation (now Equality Michigan), etc.

In 1999, I was hired as the executive director of Affirmations. It was quite a seven-year journey from being terrified to attend that first women's rap group to running the organization. I believed it then and I still believe it to this day... Affirmations saved my life.

What has your path looked like since moving on from Affirmations?

It has looked pretty good! I had already been doing stand-up comedy around town a bit, occasionally getting an opportunity to travel and be funny. The chance to perform in Las Vegas presented itself and I dove head-first into the competition. Out of 270 comics, I came in second and earned the opportunity to perform in Vegas several times over the next five or so years. I continued doing stand-up until 2016.

In 2010, I began dating Cindy Norlin. In 2014, we were married in New Mexico. We both love to travel and since leaving Affirmations, we have been all over the world, including Africa and China. I was able to turn Cindy into a Disney fan

and we have also spent many trips wandering around the Disney properties in Florida and California.

We also spent 19 days in a camper driving every mile of Route 66, from downtown Chicago to Santa Monica, a dream we discovered we both shared on our first date. That trip was part of us living in our camper for five months after having sold our Royal Oak home.

Within a year of moving into a beautiful Ferndale condo, we had sold it and were on our way to Asheville, North Carolina. We have been living in the mountains now since 2019.

What are some of your proudest moments doing nonprofit work?

When I first started at Affirmations, attendance was down, all the staff had walked out in protest over some board action, there was no money in the bank and the building was a mess. Jan Stevenson and Susan Horowitz knew that I had helped get two organizations (Camp Fire and the Boys and Girls Club) back on their feet and corralled me at a Women's Film Night. Within a month I was hired at Affirmations.

I was in my element! It wasn't long before staff were hired. We started to see the attendance go back up, held a very successful fundraiser, worked with the HOPE Fund to get Affirmations back on track financially, and began convincing the board that we needed a new facility. If we wanted the LGBTQ+ community to feel pride, then they had to have a community center to be proud of. Seriously, at my very

first board meeting in October 1999, I presented the board with an Excel spreadsheet floorplan of a new building.

It may have taken me eight years to see my dream come to fruition, but my proudest moment happened the weekend of Pride in 2007! We set out to raise \$3.5 million and instead raised \$5.3 million. We received capital donations of \$250,000 each from Ford, GM and Chrysler. At the time, the largest corporate contribution to an LGBTQ+ organization, anywhere, from a Fortune 500 company... let alone three of them. And the building was certainly something the community could be proud of. With big windows facing Nine Mile, we made a statement to the greater community and to ourselves — we don't need to hide anymore.

I had many Affirmations moments along the way that I am proud of:

- More than 500 folks attended the Big Bash at Metro Airport!
- Having the marquee at Royal Oak Music Theatre say "GM presents Affirmations Big Bash" in 2010, the first time a major corporation in metro Detroit had been willing to have their name openly associated with an LGBTQ+ organization.
- All three candidates for governor came and spoke at Affirmations in 2002, another first.
- Having Maryann Mahaffey present me with the Spirit of Detroit award was special

See **Where Are They Now**, page 26

◀ Protest Tips

Continued from page 10

learning experience and that there's much to be gained from those around you. "I learned a lot just by attending meetings, organizing actions and learning from elders and veterans in the space," he said. "I think that's where I learned most of what I know. Obviously you learn a lot by experience, but I feel very grateful for the connections that I have and that I build through ACT UP."

"We connect with our elders to learn things that worked and things that didn't," he added. "A lot of coalitions that were built as a result of the different climates of our past, navigated those different waters and we can learn from that — obviously different protest tactics."

Know your rights as a protester.

As a protester, it's important to know your rights, so you can make informed decisions if they're ever infringed upon.

You have the right to...

- Demonstrate in "traditional public forums" such as sidewalks, parks and streets. Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel noted that restrictions apply to some specific public spaces such as voting locations and universities.
- Be protected by private property owners. Counter protest.
- Photograph anything in plain view as long as you're in a public space — including law enforcement.

- March on streets or sidewalks without a permit.

Learn more about your rights in the comprehensive protest guide on ACLU's website at aclu.org/know-your-rights/protesters-rights.

Prepare for potential encounters with law enforcement.

Before attending a protest, Rosenberg suggests writing a legal number on the inside of your arm in case you do get arrested. Michiganlegalhelp.org provides a helpful breakdown of services specific to your area or you can always request legal assistance from the ACLU of Michigan at 313-578-6800, but be aware of their limited hours.

Rosenberg added that it's important to identify where key individuals are when entering a space, including medics, anyone with water or supplies and, most importantly, marshals.

Protest marshals are specially trained protesters often found on the outside perimeters of groups to ensure the safety of those within, usually wearing bright or neon clothing. They're typically communicating with organizers outside the space and are equipped to handle anyone dealing with mental health episodes or in need of medical assistance. Essentially, they're your point of contact for any significant issue, as they have grasp on where all assistance is located.

If you are detained, try to write down what you remember when given the opportunity —

including names, badge and patrol car numbers and the agency the officers work for. If you're injured or you believe your rights have been violated, these details may

said consent is key.

"It is a conversation and it's ensuring the consent of everyone in the group that there will be photos, there will be filming and if you do not want to be in the photos and filming, then let us know and there will still be space for you at this action, but it will be in a different physical space," he said.

When planning a protest, Rosenberg added, you have to be deliberate in including everyone and not leaving anyone "on the margins." Abad shared similar insight, explaining that even within communities that are

places that I'm going to be able to go to that my trans sisters and peers that are dark skin — just as smart, just as beautiful, just as competent — are not going to be able to be heard or be in."

Documenting these nuances help ensure everyone is protected.

Build momentum online through virtual protesting and solidarity messages.

Sometimes the hardest part of protest is getting eyes on a movement. Rosenberg said one of the most effective ways is engaging through storytelling.

"The idea is to [share] moments and stories to make sure as many eyes can get on the issue that you're protesting about," he said. "You have to be very thoughtful and mindful about how you convey that message through social media. Whether it is the chants that are in a video, whether it's on a banner or whether it's on a t-shirt."

He noted that if the message being conveyed by a group doesn't fully align with what you're looking for, it's good to create something

new — you may help others in doing so.

"Especially at this time, we must make sure that no one is left behind," Rosenberg said. "We've seen too many communities on the margins getting left behind in our larger movements or spaces and we have to look and see if those spaces are worth fighting for."

"If the space doesn't exist, create it for yourself and create it for others because others may be looking for that space too," Rosenberg said.



Outside Uganda House in New York City protesting the "Anti-Homosexuality Bill, 2023" in April 25, 2023. Courtesy photo



Activist Jason Rosenberg outside Speaker Mike Johnson's office in the U.S. Capitol on Dec. 5, 2024 during Gender Liberation Movement's "Bathroom Sit-in" in protest of their anti-trans bathroom bill. Photo: Alexa Wilkinson

become pertinent — be sure to take pictures of any injuries too!

Document and amplify

Document and share the protest without exposing vulnerable individuals.

While you're fully within your rights to take photos and videos at public protest events, Rosenberg

discriminated against, some are granted more privilege than others.

"Yes, if we talk about the totem pole, I am at a shitty part of the totem pole because I'm a trans woman of color," Abad said. "But even with that shitty part of the totem pole that I'm at, there's trans women of color that are at a shittier part of the totem pole because of things that we don't talk about, like colorism. Because I'm lighter complected, there are spaces and

**genderless pricing
genderless products
fabulous hair + skin care**

@bgstudiosynsi
bgstudios.online

Call or Text (734)678-6652
2520 Packard Rd. Ypsilanti 48197

bg studios
H a i r + S k i n

Rebirth in Action

How renowned opera futurist Yuval Sharon is transforming the art form for Detroit audiences



Yuval Sharon speaking at a book discussion and signing at Wasserman Projects in October 2024. Photo: Detroit Opera/Austin Richey

BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI

If, as Detroit Opera artistic director Yuval Sharon writes, “rebirth is opera’s true power,” then he embodies that potential, continually reshaping the art form to be more inclusive, innovative and dynamic. At the helm of Detroit Opera, Sharon has revitalized the traditional, in part an effort to make opera accessible and resonant for a wider audience.

My own introduction to seeing Sharon’s work came in 2020, while shelter-in-place restrictions were implemented. That year, I

joined my pandemic pod in a Toyota Rav4 to experience his groundbreaking, inaugural Detroit Opera premiere — a drive-thru performance of “Twilight: Gods,” staged in the Detroit Opera House Parking Center, all seen through car windows on multiple levels of the structure. Who knew opera could thrive in such an unconventional setting? Sharon did. And he’s proven it can, earning global acclaim for his innovative vision right here in the heart of downtown Detroit.

From renaming the company in his first year to radically reimagining productions,

Sharon’s efforts have consistently pushed the boundaries of what opera can mean to a modern audience, garnering significant acclaim from critics and audiences alike. The Detroit Free Press commended Sharon’s direction of his reimagining of “Bliss,” stating that “director Yuval Sharon’s whimsical staging captured imaginations almost right away.” Additionally, the Los Angeles Times observed that Sharon’s production of “The Valkyries” at the Hollywood Bowl “makes history again,” emphasizing his ability to bring a “boldly progressive” vision to

traditional works.

Sharon’s passion for his craft as artistic director of Detroit Opera is evident not only in the work he produces but also in the modest charm of his office at the Detroit Opera House. The walls and bookshelves are lined with volumes on history and music, offering a glimpse into the depth of his inspiration. On a calm December day, I take in these details while seated at a table beneath a striking poster for “Twilight: Gods,” a vivid reminder of his unwavering “show must go on” mentality during a time

when live performance around the globe came to a halt. In the weeks leading up to our conversation, I found myself thinking about opera more than ever before, thanks to Sharon's ability to transform one of the more traditionally inaccessible art forms into a welcoming invitation — a concept he explores in his new book "A New Philosophy of Opera."

"Let's start thinking of opera as evolutionary rather than decaying," he writes. "Let's consider the experience of going to the opera as a way of thinking and feeling that will benefit us outside the theater. Let's start viewing opera as an engine for empathy and awe, and decide to attend a performance with an explorer's mindset. That means opening ourselves up to the unfamiliar."

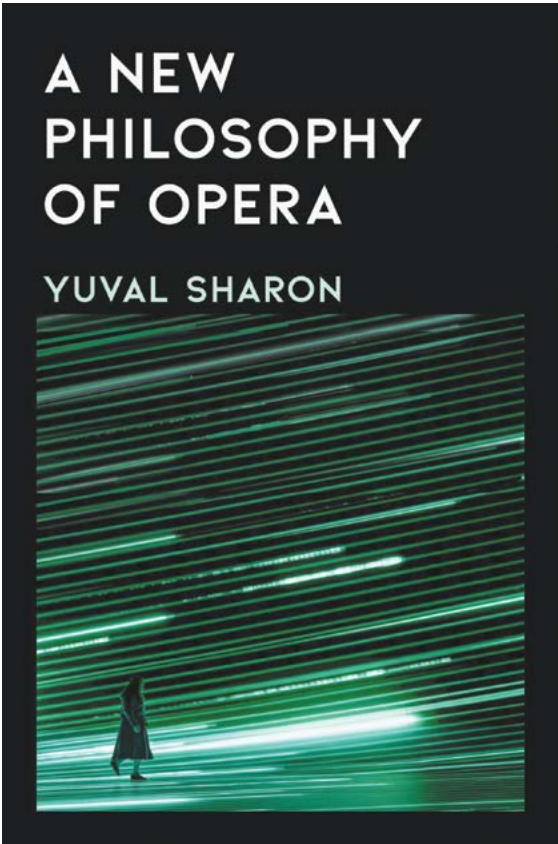
Sharon's own journey into opera began at adolescence, when his father, while working in Germany, took him to a production of "La Traviata." Remarkably, for someone now celebrated for his groundbreaking opera productions, Sharon recalls "mostly oscillating between boredom and incomprehension" during the performance, as he recalls in his book. Yet it's precisely these early experiences that may have fueled his mission to create operas that defy such reactions. After all, it was that "restless teenager" who didn't "understand a thing of what's happening onstage" that, as he writes, eventually became "the chairperson of that same opera company's board of directors."

Today, Sharon's productions actively work against feelings of detachment and confusion. His "Twilight: Gods," for instance, transformed the Ring Cycle as an immersive experience set in a parking structure, bringing opera to life in an unexpected and approachable way. Similarly, his 2021 staging of "Bliss" explored repetition and abstraction in ways that captivated modern audiences, while The Industry's "Invisible Cities" reimagined opera as a site-specific performance in a bustling L.A. train station in 2013, as the audience freely roamed through an operating train station to engage with the story. These innovative approaches invite audiences into the art form, offering them experiences that are anything but boring or incomprehensible.

For Sharon, he's walked the line between embracing fearlessness while also honoring opera's rich traditions. "Part of the education I've had so far at this job is, you need the boldness, but you also don't want to be just a bull in the China shop that's just destroying everything," he says. "Twilight: Gods" could've sat until restrictions on in-person theatergoing were lifted, but Sharon saw those restrictions as an opportunity. He says

he was keen on "doing a project right out of the gate."

"I really wanted to make sure that my arrival would be part and parcel with a project that acted like a statement of intention, which was despite challenges, despite things feeling like they're falling apart — and in many ways were falling apart — and needed to clear the way for something new to emerge. That's exactly when we need art most. Because it can really remind us of our humanity, and that seems so important."



"Art always adapts to the times," he adds. "And so I really wanted to make that claim."

When the Detroit Opera House reopened to the public, Sharon imagined the stage as an opportunity to be an engine for the empathy and awe that opera can uniquely evoke. In 2022, Detroit Opera presented his innovative production of Puccini's "La Bohème," performed in reverse order from Act IV to Act I, as well as "X: The Life and Times of Malcolm X," composed by Anthony Davis. For the latter, Sharon championed that work due to Malcolm X's significant importance in Detroit.

"Those felt like, again, another kind of statement of principles of what I wanted the company to be about," Sharon explains. "On one hand, we love the classics, we love the tradition, but we have an opportunity every single time we do it to explore it from another perspective."

Speaking about "La Bohème," he says, "We all love this opera. We love it so much that we think it works really well backward as

See Yuval Sharon, page 22



**Proud member
of the LGBTQ
community**

StateFarm



Demetrike Wells-O'Brien
Agent Owner

AUTO | HOME | BUSINESS | LIFE INSURANCE
734-995-9288 WELLSOBRIEN.COM
Plymouth Rd, Ann Arbor



MICHIGAN'S LGBTQ+ NEWS SOURCE SINCE 1993

BTL
Between! Lines

PRIDESOURCE

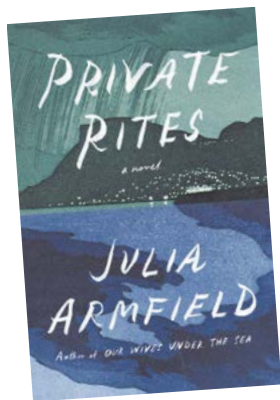
**Are You Ready To
Introduce Your Business
to the LGBTQ+ Community?**

PRIDESOURCE.COM/ADVERTISE

Winter Reads to Help You Ride Out the Chill

Cozy up with these queer books

BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI & SARAH BRICKER HUNT



It's cold out there, and not just because of the weather — we're officially in another Trump era. Bearing the frigid temps outside and the chill of our current political landscape, it's all too easy to get stuck in the grip of endless headlines and doomscrolling. If you're feeling the weight of the world closing in, it's time to unplug and escape into a different kind of world, perhaps one that includes fantastical forest homes — or Cher. Step away from the screen and lose yourself in one of these captivating reads that promise respite, inspiration and, at times, divine gay icon wisdom — recommendations from Editorial Director Chris Azzopardi and Managing Editor Sarah Bricker Hunt.



Chris's list:

'Private Rites,' Julia Armfield

Need a reminder that family dynamics can be complex in various forms? Blending the personal and apocalyptic, Julia Armfield's "Private Rites" offers a poignant and unsettling exploration of just that. The story follows three estranged sisters — all queer — who are brought together after their cruel father's death to sort through his estate in a world where it never stops raining. The sisters' reunion — born out of necessity rather than warmth — seems like a chance to heal old wounds. But when a shocking secret in their father's will drives them even further apart, they're forced to confront not only their fractured family bonds but also a sinister mystery. As their lives unravel and the world teeters on the brink of catastrophe, the sisters realize that they've been chosen for something much darker. This revelation forces them to reckon with the legacy of their father and a fate that could have devastating consequences for both their family and the world at large. "Private Rites" has received glowing

reviews, deemed "stunning" by Harper's Bazaar and praised by Vulture as "a queer end to the world you don't want to miss."

'Sinéad O'Connor: The Last Interview and Other Conversations'

In 2014, I had the privilege of interviewing Irish music icon and outspoken critic of the Catholic Church, Sinéad O'Connor, who died in 2023. Her unfiltered honesty was a breath of fresh air, standing in stark contrast to the polished, often guarded personas of many celebrities. That conversation is among eight others featured in "Sinéad O'Connor: The Last Interview and Other Conversations," part of Melville House Publishing's esteemed series, which highlights the voices of significant cultural figures. My interview, the sole piece in the collection conducted for LGBTQ+ press, captures a uniquely personal moment with O'Connor, who at the time spoke candidly about her life and identity.



See **Chris's List**, next page

Sarah's list:

'Coming Home,' Brittney Griner

At first glance, Brittney Griner's, "Coming Home" is primarily a harrowing account of her nine-month detention in Russia, where her identity as a gay Black athlete added layers of vulnerability to an already precarious situation — one that thrust Griner into harsh international scrutiny. The book goes well beyond the details of her 2022 arrest for carrying vape cartridges containing medical cannabis oil, however. Griner's journey is one of redemption and hope, with a true love story at the center.

The book, co-written with Michelle Burford, weaves Griner's detention narrative with personal history, including her coming out story and her father's initial rejection ("I ain't raising no gay bitch!") before their eventual reconciliation. Her relationship with wife Cherelle emerges as a source of strength throughout her ordeal, evidenced by tender details like finding comfort in touching Cherelle's signature in a sudoku book.

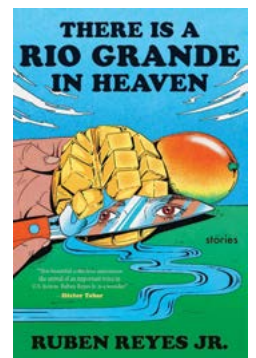
Now free and back playing basketball, Griner welcomed her first child with Cherelle in 2024. The book serves as both a suspenseful memoir and a warning about the risks LGBTQ+ athletes face in countries with anti-gay policies, even as lucrative overseas contracts continue to draw American players to these regions.

'There Is a Rio Grande in Heaven,' Ruben Reyes, Jr.

"There Is a Rio Grande in Heaven" by Ruben Reyes, Jr. marks a groundbreaking debut in speculative fiction, weaving LGBTQ+ and Latinx narratives into 12 short pieces that blur the lines between fantasy and reality.

The collection includes both short and flash-fiction entries that explore queer experiences, immigration and cultural identity through a sci-fi lens (though, arguably, "sci-fi" isn't a perfect description for the genre here). In one story, a gay son grapples with losing his homophobic father while imagining a more accepting alternate version. Another story reimagines the traditional immigration narrative, depicting Americans attempting to reach Mars while facing violent consequences if caught.

Reyes, the son of two Salvadoran immigrants, tackles complex themes within the Latinx community, including



See **Sarah's List**, next page

Chris's List

Continued from previous page

Alongside it are other illuminating pieces, including NME's 1988 interview "I Open My Mouth and Scream" and a 1991 Rolling Stone feature, together painting a vivid, multifaceted portrait of Sinéad O'Connor. Musician and friend Kristin Hersh of band Throwing Muses contributes a poignant introduction, reflecting on O'Connor's enduring legacy: "I wished she could have shouted all that she believed and made only friends, no enemies. I wished that she had never accepted that invitation to the entertainment industry party and, instead, had kept the richness of her own life untainted. I wished that she could have loved herself and everyone else. I wished that she had absorbed the spiritual peace she fought for. But that wouldn't have been Sinéad, I guess." Through these candid and deeply personal conversations, the book captures the essence of an artist who defied conventions and left an indelible mark.

TJ Klune's Paperback Collection

Out gay fantasy writer and Lambda Literary Award winner TJ Klune won't just help you survive winter — his work might just sustain you through the entire year. Maybe even the next three, if you pace yourself by reading one book from his new boxed set annually. Each novel invites readers to escape into fantastical worlds brimming with promise of a better existence and a kinder world. In the found-family tale "In the Lives of Puppets," Klune introduces a peculiar home nestled within the



branches of a grove of trees, where a family of robots shares their lives with a human named Vic. Meanwhile, "The House in the Cerulean Sea" transports readers to a mysterious island housing an orphanage for magical children deemed "dangerous." Here, Linus Baker, a by-the-book caseworker, discovers that these children — and their enigmatic caretaker — challenge everything he thought he knew about rules, love and acceptance. "Under the Whispering Door," about a ghost who refuses to cross over and the ferryman he falls in love with, rounds out the set. Come on, whimsy, take us away.

'Cher: The Memoir, Part One,' Cher

In 2023, when I asked Cher when we could finally expect her memoir, she responded with her signature wit: "I don't know, babe. Don't ask. Well, you just did, but don't ask me again." Thankfully, I didn't have to. Her memoir — part one, at least — turned back time on her iconic life and career when it arrived just in time to help us believe in life after a politically turbulent winter. This first volume covers Cher's journey from her childhood to her breakthrough as an acclaimed actress. It opens with an author's note explaining her thoughtful decision to use her son Chaz's deadname, with his permission, to accurately reflect the eras she discusses. Though Cher admitted to The New York Times in November that she hasn't read her memoir yet, the book serves up a deeply personal feast of

See **Chris's List**, page 24

Sarah's List

Continued from previous page

internal discrimination and exploitation through stories ranging from a Latinx-owned company underpaying workers to a magical mango tree being exploited, perhaps a critical commentary on overlapping community intersectionalities.

The book culminates in an interactive chapter where readers create their own immigration story. Throughout the collection, Reyes maintains a delicate balance between fantastical elements and harsh realities, making the work accessible to a broad range of readers beyond the sci-fi genre. His careful handling of queer and immigrant perspectives creates a unique contribution to both speculative and LGBTQ+ literature.

'Kissing Girls on Shabbat,' Sara Glass

In her debut memoir, New York Times "Modern Love" contributor Sara Glass offers a raw and intimate memoir of growing up lesbian in Brooklyn's strict Gur Hasidic community, where same-sex relationships are condemned and arranged heterosexual marriages are the norm.

Glass details her journey from a sheltered 19-year-old bride in an arranged marriage to her eventual emergence as an out lesbian at age 32. The memoir chronicles her secret relationship with a woman named Dassa, her complicated first marriage to Yossi and a subsequent marriage to another man — both driven by religious expectations and custody concerns for her children.

The book explores the unique challenges faced by LGBTQ+ individuals in ultra-

religious communities, where rejection of traditional marriage can mean complete ostracization. Glass describes harrowing experiences, including a traumatic childbirth delayed by religious constraints and the constant pressure to suppress her identity.

While acknowledging positive aspects of her Hasidic upbringing, Glass ultimately advocates for those trapped between religious obligations and authentic sexuality. The memoir ends on a hopeful note, with Glass finally securing custody of her children and finding freedom to live openly. You'll never read her "Modern Love" contributions the same way again.

'A Boy Named Rose,' Gaelle Geniller

A gorgeously illustrated graphic novel nominated for a 2024 Eisner Award, "A Boy Named Rose" focuses its tender narrative on 19-year-old Rose, a rising stage performer at famed Parisian theater Le Jardin.

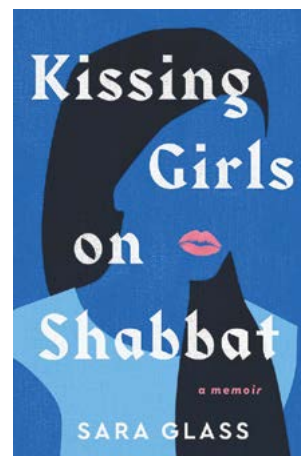
Rose begins exploring feminine presentation while pursuing dance under the guidance of three mentors known as The Flowers. Set against the backdrop of Paris's nightlife, the narrative blends themes of artistic expression, gender exploration and found family.

Geniller's artwork captures both the glittering allure of cabaret life and intimate moments of personal transformation. The acclaimed work, translated from French by Fabrice Sapolsky, stands out for its celebratory approach to gender nonconformity and its portrayal of a supportive queer community within

Le Jardin's walls.

While addressing serious themes of

See **Sarah's List**, page 24



 **The Center** for Relationship Health
Founder and Director Dr. Joe Kort

JOIN CRSH'S
**QUEER MEN'S
SUPPORT GROUP**

Individual, Group and Couples Therapy

www.crsh.com | 248-399-7447
25600 Woodward Ave., Suite 215, Royal Oak
First Wednesday & Third Friday of Every Month



Group run by:
Gregg Johnson, LMSW
Steven Taylor, LMSW



Scan for more info
or go to crsh.com

**LOOKING TO REACH
THE LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY?**

PRIDESOURCE.COM/ADVERTISE

When a Casserole Is Not Enough

Building healthcare teams for a tough era

BY KELLI DUNHAM

When the morning of Nov. 6 came, and we learned Trump would be the next president, my first instinct was to text friends who had been delaying healthcare. “Now is the time to stop putting it off,” I urged, fingers flying like the middle-aged, nudgy Queer Uncle that I am.

Had I paused even a millisecond to think this through, I might have held back. After all, when you’re stunned and trying not to panic, the last thing you need is a well-meaning text urging you to tackle the Very Hard Thing you’ve been avoiding — right now — on top of everything else.

But one thing I had right: We will need our connections with each other to get through the next few years and beyond. The political climate may shift unpredictably, but one constant remains — healthcare is easier to navigate with a solid team. Whether you’re building a care team from scratch or strengthening the one you have, now’s the time to act.

Here are some ideas to consider, bearing in mind that you’re the expert on your own life, so take what works and leave the rest.

Find a healthcare accountability buddy

We often expect our partners in life to be our partners in health, but that can get messy fast. Like many queer people (and many nurses), I’ve had to be aggressively convinced to seek care, even, or perhaps especially, when it was ridiculously, obviously necessary. A friend once pointed out this wasn’t fair to my partner, who already had to manage their own worry and then take on the emotional labor of managing my healthcare.

Since then, I’ve built mutual healthcare buddy relationships with friends — people not necessarily in my closest inner circle but willing to help me prioritize preventative care, chronic conditions and follow-ups. It’s not perfect, but it’s taken a lot of pressure off my partners over the years.

Each buddy relationship is unique, but possible roles include:

- **Crafting a care plan.** If you’ve been putting off a dentist visit, bloodwork and a mole check, the sheer scope might feel overwhelming. Your buddy can help break it down into manageable steps.
- **Accompaniment to appointments,** either IRL or virtually. Even if you wouldn’t want to, say, Zoom a healthcare buddy during a long-delayed pap exam, knowing they’re available via text can mean the difference between feeling traumatized and alone or just feeling traumatized. This might not sound like a big deal, but in practice, it can make a big difference.
- **Advocacy assistance.** We delay care for good reasons — because it’s expensive, because we’ve been traumatized by past experiences and because intersecting identities (e.g., being trans, disabled or a person of color) can snowball into an avalanche. A buddy can potentially advocate for you anywhere it’s difficult for you to advocate for yourself, from making appointments to talking with insurance companies. The fact that most of us can argue much longer for someone else than we can for ourselves is perhaps something to address in therapy. But in the meantime,



there’s no shame in using our own dysfunction to help someone we care about get their bottom surgery covered!

- **Friendly encouragement** via competition, e.g., see who can visit the dentist first! Don’t scoff; it works in softball, and it can work for healthcare.

Widen your circle of care

Aggressively de-isolate. A few years ago, I led a workshop at the Philly Trans Wellness Conference, which draws people from around the world, including those from isolated areas and situations. As I was leading the group through my standard chant of “never go to the hospital alone,” one member raised her hand to say, “This is all nice, but I’m not partnered and completely stealth in my community; who would I take the emergency room with me?”

We stopped our chanting for a moment and sat in silence. And then — with the questioner’s permission — we began brainstorming how to find potentially supportive people. Examples included:

- 12 step groups (open groups

allow non-addict-identified folks to attend)

- Inclusive and/or liberal churches (the Christian church has been making life harder for LGBTQ+ people for ages; work that guilt angle if you need to!),
- Businesses that take a lot of LGBTQ+ money (the local Birkenstock store or the Subaru dealer?)
- Local chapters of relevant disease-specific organizations.

If you are geographically isolated, the particulars of this list might not be relevant to your area or your situation; the value is in brainstorming and seeking folks out beforehand, not texting from the urgent care. Remember, you’re not looking for a best friend, so whether you have anything in common with them is less important than their willingness to build community for a potential crisis.

As Regina Lattler, a Michigan trans woman living in a rural area, explained, “There are transphobes everywhere, but there are also allies everywhere. I found my healthcare buddy in a knitting group.”

Create a structure for care

Mutual aid became a buzzword during COVID-19, but marginalized communities have been doing this forever. Start simple: a group text thread where you can make requests like, “I need to get bloodwork done — can anyone come with me on Monday morning? I’ll bring coffee.”

If that’s not enough, consider a shared calendar, spreadsheet or even apps like Lotsa Helping Hands or CareBridge. These tools aren’t always designed for mutual caregiving but can be adapted. Check security settings before using them — your group’s most vulnerable member sets the standard.

None of this is easy. When you’re overwhelmed and curled up in the fetal position, bed can feel like the only reasonable position and reaching out almost impossible. But taking the first small step now to building a care team makes it easier to get through hard times later. And if nothing else, it’s nice to know someone’s got your back when you’re stuck waiting on hold with insurance.

Because even the tastiest combination of tater tots and cream of mushroom soup can’t help you file an appeal.

policy-wise and leadership-wise. We have strong allies in the governor, attorney general, secretary of state. We have a progressive majority on our Michigan Supreme Court.”

Away from his legal work, Kaplan relishes time spent working in community theater, directing productions that often reflect diverse stories and communities. “I’m directing a play this year for Stagecrafters 2nd Stage,” he shares, discussing an upcoming production of “Somewhere,” which focuses on a Puerto Rican family in 1959 New York City. “I’ve been able to direct shows that deal with being gay or that focus on the transgender community. I like shows that have a message.”

Kaplan’s theatrical pursuits aren’t just a hobby — they’re a vital part of maintaining balance in his life. Two years ago, he appeared in “The Inheritance” at the Ringwald Theatre, and for nearly 20 years, he’s been collaborating with a friend to create cabaret shows performed in various spaces. “That brings me a great deal of joy,” he says.

Looking toward the future, Kaplan

offers his trademark blend of realism and optimism — while he’s approaching retirement age and looking forward to a different pace at some point, he can’t imagine completely stepping away from advocacy work. “I don’t know if I’ll ever retire from doing some kind of work. I think I have too many interests and too much energy, and I always want to be involved in helping people,” he says. However, he recognizes the importance of making space for new leaders, when the time comes, noting, “It’s important to have new people come in who have new perspectives and can bring a fresh approach.”

This perspective reflects broader changes he’s observed in the LGBTQ+ community over the decades. “There weren’t many organizations at the beginning and there were limited resources and funding, and so sometimes you found a lot of turf wars going on,” he recalls. “I’m not seeing that anymore, and I think it’s because we’ve developed more organizations and resources and people working together for a common good.”

Above all, Kaplan emphasizes the importance of seeking happiness while continuing the fight for equality, even in the face of a second Trump administration — an election the GOP won after viciously campaigning

against LGBTQ+ rights, including here in Michigan. “Some of the opposition would like us to feel completely defeated, to feel this sense of hopelessness and to not be able to find joy in our lives,” he acknowledges. “And I think probably the strongest antidote to all of this is for us to find the joyful things in our life. It doesn’t mean you’re neglecting the cause or anything like that. You have to have that balance.”

Whatever is to come in 2025 and beyond, Kaplan remains energized and committed. After all, there’s still plenty of work to be done — and plenty of happiness to be found. “I feel very committed to this idea that we’re going to work really hard on the ways to come up with solutions, and it might look different than some of the traditional ways that we’ve looked at that,” he says. With a new great-niece on the way, theater productions to direct and ongoing advocacy work, Kaplan plans to keep balancing the serious work of civil rights advocacy with finding delight in life’s simple pleasures.

“No election can change what I think is right, what I think is fair,” he says. “Nothing’s going to stop me from fighting back and standing up for what’s right.”



Jay Kaplan in Detroit. Photo: Andrew Potter

RUTH ELLIS CLAIRMOUNT

L

G

B

T

Q

+

- GENDER AFFIRMING CARE
- STI TESTING & TREATMENT
- HEALTH NAVIGATION
- CONTRACEPTION
- HIV TREATMENT
- PRIMARY CARE
- PREP

OPEN TO ALL AGES

Health & Wellness Center

313-484-5888
61 Clairmount Ave.
Detroit, MI 48202

Ruth Ellis Center

MDHHS
Michigan Department of Health & Human Services

HENRY FORD HEALTH

F	L	A	P		C	L	I	M	B		B	O	R	N
R	I	G	A		D	A	L	A	I		S	H	O	O
E	V	E	R	Y	T	H	I	N	G		A	B	U	T
R	E	N	E	E		R	E	N	T	A		E	T	E
E	N	T	R	A	P			A	I	R	S	H	I	P
						R	O	S	S		M	A	N	A
						W	A	N	T	T	O	B	E	L
A	R	I	D			S	A	N	E			B	E	S
C	E	L	I	E		G	I	S	M	O	S			
H	I	D	E	R	S		C	O	A	L		N	O	B
I	N	H	U	M	A	N			E	L	A	I	N	E
E	S	O				A	L	I	C	E	W	A	L	K
V	E	R	Y			I	C	A	R	E		F	I	A
E	R	S	E			N	O	N	O	S		I	T	C
S	T	E	P			E	L	I	O	T		E	A	T

The Color Purple
Puzzle can be found on page 25

Shop LGBTQ+
PRIDESOURCE.COM

well as forward, and let's try it. Let's try it to see what we learned from it. And of course, everyone that was part of it gained such an enormous appreciation of the work itself."

Late last year, it was announced that Sharon would continue his role at Detroit Opera for another four years while stepping away from The Industry, the experimental opera company he founded and led in Los Angeles for nearly 15 years, a move he calls "bittersweet" but practical given that he's splitting most of his time between Detroit and New York now. He has ambitious "lifetime" projects coming up at The Met, and his partner, a theater producer who graduated from the University of Michigan, lives there. (They met through Detroit Opera.)

"I want everything to be as meaningful as possible," he says. "I started that company and I was able to bring it along so far. So I feel great about all that. And it feels like it's a good moment. I just did a project in June there, so it just feels like, let's end on a high note."

When we met just weeks after Trump was elected president, Sharon discussed drawing inspiration from an eclectic mix of sources, including political discourse, Beyoncé and Kamala Harris's belief in shared commonalities. Tilda Swinton was on his mind too.

During an interview with The New York Times, Swinton reflected on Trump's re-election in a way that deeply resonated with Sharon, as she discussed people's "innate goodness." "I do believe we were all little children, scared little animals once, including all of those people that we're thinking about," she told the Times. "I don't know what happened to them to make them this mean, but we have to contact them somehow."

For Sharon, he has found his way to connect. This year's lineup at Detroit Opera reflects his vision of using opera to explore diverse facets of humanity. On Feb. 22, out countertenor Anthony Roth Costanzo stars in Louisa Proske's reimagined production of "Rinaldo." On April 5, Sharon debuts his fresh take on Mozart's "Così fan tutte," transforming the controversial comedy into a futuristic experiment through the lens of artificial intelligence. Then, beginning May 10, the Opera

House will stage "The Central Park Five," directed by Davis, who won a Pulitzer Prize for the production, tackling themes of racial injustice, resilience and redemption.

"One of the things I really love about opera," Sharon explains, "is that every single opera can be about a different facet of humanity. 'The Central Park Five' is an amazing paean to social justice, and it's so important that we're doing it — I can't wait for it. 'Così,' obviously, doesn't have a social justice theme but uses a classic traditional opera to explore something really, really

as general director and president of Opera Philadelphia. "He realizes that in order for this tradition to flourish, we need new methods of perception, new vehicles for absorption. His resourcefulness in repurposing this tradition is singular."

That sentiment is shared by Patty Isacson Sabee, CEO and president of Detroit Opera. "The man loves opera," Sabee enthuses. "All the choices Yuval has made — deconstructing and reconstructing opera for the modern age — come from his deep love of opera and

to and communicate with and be in dialogue with. So really from the beginning, I wanted that name change."

"Yuval has made a point of embracing the Detroit community from the moment he arrived here in 2020, not only meeting with many community and cultural leaders, but also by immersing himself in our city's music traditions and featuring local artists onstage," Sabee says.

She notes that "he is engaging the community in conversations on issues that matter deeply,"



Davóné Tines and Yuval Sharon during a rehearsal for "Europas 3 and 4" in March 2024. Photo: Detroit Opera / Austin Richey

contemporary and of the moment. And there are operas that are all about sexuality."

"Opera, in so many ways, could be a really queer art form, because from the beginning, there have been men playing women, women playing men, and characters professing love for each other played by two people of the same gender."

In "Rinaldo," Costanzo takes on the titular role. He collaborated with Sharon previously on "The Comet/Poppea," staged in June 2024 in Los Angeles. The production was directed by Sharon and featured Costanzo in a starring role.

"I am so honored to have collaborated closely with Yuval as both a singer and a producer, and I know what a reverence he has for the tradition that opera is built upon," says Costanzo, who, in June 2024, began his new role

an insatiable curiosity about the connections between what was happening when the opera was written and how it connects with what matters to us today."

Sharon's artistic risk-taking is reflected beyond his productions — he was instrumental in the decision to change the name of the company from Michigan Opera Theatre to Detroit Opera in early 2022. The change, he says, was influenced by his perception that the name Michigan Opera Theatre was "carrying with it some older ideas of what opera was supposed to be."

"Of course, it took some convincing, but not much," he says. "Really, from the beginning, I wanted that name change. [It] feels so much more contemporary and so much more important now. Our cultural institutions really reflect the communities that were built in that we are trying to respond

referencing both Davis's "X: The Life and Times of Malcolm X" and "The Central Park Five."

"Matthew Ozawa's new production of 'Madame Butterfly' in 2023 spurred conversations with our Asian American community that challenged ideas about the opera's themes of Orientalism and depictions of Japanese women and culture," she adds. "All these are 'made in Detroit' moments that could not have happened anywhere else, or without Yuval Sharon."

Even the cover of "A New Philosophy of Opera" underscores Sharon's progressive vision, featuring one of the rare trans opera singers, Lucia Lucas, from a Lyric Opera of Chicago production of "Proximity." In it, Sharon writes, "The art we experience and the narratives we share ultimately cultivate opposing views on the past: as either open

and changeable, or as closed and observable. Zooming out, we could apply the same characteristics to conservative worldviews — which idolize origins as perfect and consider change a degradation; or to progressive ones — which emphasize mutability, becoming, and the possibility of a better future by actively transforming the past. In one case, paradise is irrevocably lost; in the other, paradise is yet to come."

Through his work, Sharon is bridging history with our modern era and, as Costanzo says, "blazing a trail for opera's future."

"His curiosity knows no bounds," he adds, "and his steadfast commitment to craft makes him one of the most electric directors in opera."

"His work convinces us there are infinite possibilities within opera — both those we know well and the new — to discover and to be inspired to think differently about our world," Sabee adds.

To understand his artistic vision, ask Sharon about his love for Beyoncé, as I did. His face lit up as he explained her universal appeal: "Everyone's invited to the party, everybody's there to take what they want from it." It's the same inclusive philosophy he brings to opera.

Sharon also references the concept of "collective effervescence," coined by French sociologist Émile Durkheim, which he says he's felt only a few times in his life — at his temple in Los Angeles and during Beyoncé's Renaissance tour. "It was the sense of unity that sometimes you don't feel when you're home alone by yourself," he reflects.

Sharon's approach to opera is inspired by how Naomi André, a Detroit Opera board member and scholar, described Beyoncé's "Homecoming" performance in a CNN article: as "operatic." Sharon adds, "I wish opera was at that level. There's something about what she does that feels like that is what opera is meant to do: It's always a big spectacle, but she, the human, is always at the center. No matter how many video screens and flying horses are part of the show, you're only ever just amazed at this person who has us all in the palm of her hand."

Through Sharon's vision, opera reaches for that same sense of intimacy and wonder, where the grandeur serves to amplify the power of human connection.



Delivering innovative senior living services to Michigan since 1906.



Brio
LIVING SERVICES

Mission Statement

Welcoming all, partnering together, enriching lives.

Vision Statement

A world in which all are empowered to age well.



BRIO LIVING SERVICES—GREAT PLACES TO LIVE OR WORK! MyBrio.org



the
PurpleRose
theatre company

Fourteen Funerals

A Michigan Premiere by **Eric Pfeffinger**

Directed by Rhiannon Ragland

PurpleRoseTheatre.org

Feb. 6 - Mar. 9, 2025

THE FINEST IN ADULT ENTERTAINMENT AT THE BEST PRICES!

Rush - Jungle Juice - Maximum Impact - Swiss Navy - Amsterdam- ID Glide - COLT- Butterfly Kiss Pink- The Womanizer

UPTOWN BOOKSTORES ADULT VIDEO

2 LOCATIONS

WWW.UPTOWNADULT.COM

16541 Woodward Ave.
at McNichols next to "Deja Vu"
Highland Park
313.869.9477

16401 W. 8 Mile
Between Greenfield & Southfield
Detroit
313.836.0647

Hours:
Mon-Sat 10am - 9pm
Sun 12 - 6pm

Chris's List

Continued from page 19

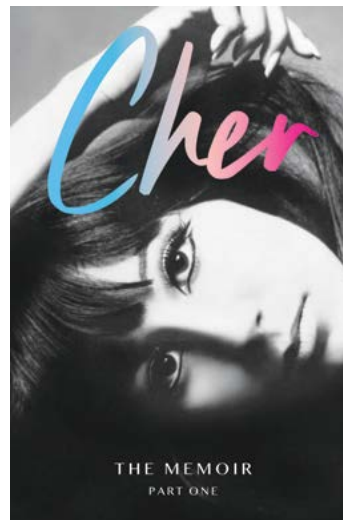
family history, the highs and lows of her tumultuous relationship with Sonny Bono, and vivid recollections from the early years of her rise to pop goddess. Cher's unflinching honesty and resilience fill every page, making this memoir not just a reflection of her life but a much-needed dose of diva inspiration in 2025. And I don't even have to ask about when we can expect Part 2 — it's out Nov. 18 of this year.

'The Unbecoming of Margaret Wolf,' Isa Arsen

They say not to judge a book by its cover, but what if that cover exudes an irresistible aura of mystery? On the jacket of Isa Arsen's "The Unbecoming of Margaret Alsen," half-hidden faces suggest untold secrets. A man's hand lights a woman's cigarette as another man watches from

the sidelines, while a wine glass hints at an evening of indulgence — leaving much to the imagination. And then there's the tagline: "Two Shakespearean actors in an unconventional marriage get caught up in a renowned director's scheme. Which will either draw them closer than ever or tear them apart for good." If Bravo had existed in the 1950s, Margaret, the rising stage actress at the heart of this story, could have easily been the star of her own series. Margaret is in a lavender marriage with Wesley, and as you settle in, you'll find yourself swept into a whirlwind of drama: the ways she "plays wife" to Wesley, her dependence on uppers ("just a little help to get through the days"), and a love triangle that unfolds between the couple and director

Vaughn Kline after Wesley joins the cast of Kline's Shakespearean production. It's a cocktail of secrets, ambition and betrayal, all served with the allure of mid-century theatrical glamour. Feeling the heat? This novel brings it in spades.



Sarah's List

Continued from page 19

identity and social acceptance, the story maintains an uplifting tone, offering a refreshing perspective on LGBTQ+ narratives through its distinctly European sensibility — plus, it's just so pretty.

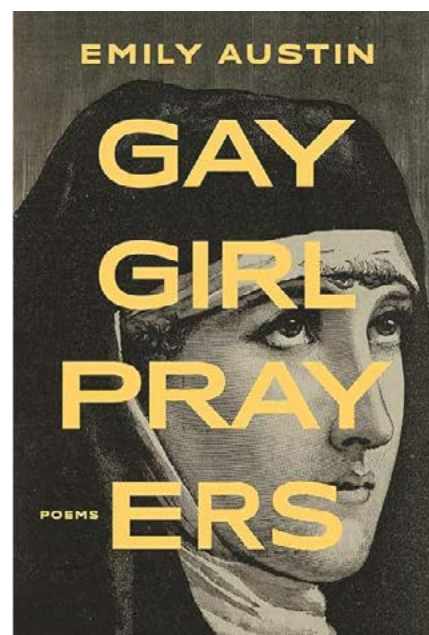
'Gay Girl Prayers,' Emily Austin

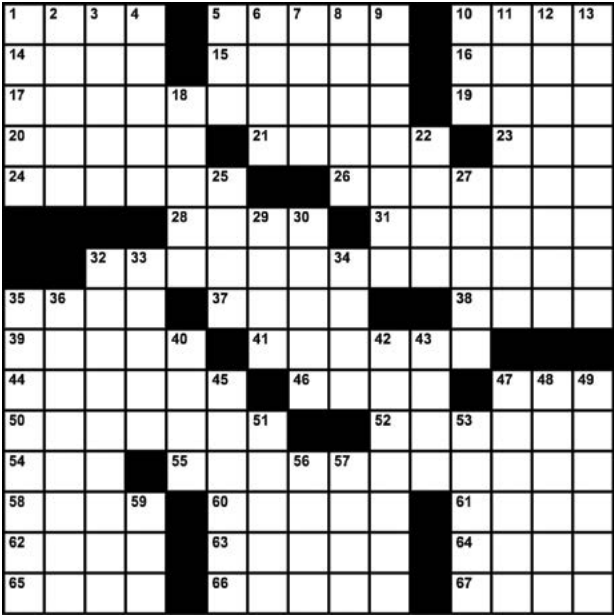
Emily Austin, already established through her debut novel "Everyone In This Room Will Someday Be Dead," makes a striking poetic entrance with "Gay Girl Prayers," a collection that reimagines Catholic doctrine through a queer lens. Literally, Austin rewrites Bible passages in a way that reflects her lived experience growing up gay in a traditionally religious culture.

The work carefully reconstructs religious

teachings to embrace LGBTQ+ experiences rather than reject faith entirely. Austin amplifies the voices of female figures who have been historically silenced by patriarchal interpretations, while simultaneously celebrating queer identity as sacred rather than sinful. The collection serves as a bridge between religious upbringing and queer identity, offering a path to reconciliation for those who have felt excluded from traditional religious spaces.

Through her verses, Austin creates an inclusive vision of spirituality that maintains reverence while challenging conventional interpretations of scripture. Rather than dismantling religious tradition, she rebuilds it into a more welcoming structure that honors both faith and queer experience, demonstrating how ancient texts can be reinterpreted to embrace rather than exclude.





Across

The Color Purple

- 1 Pajama opening
- 5 What to do to "Ev'ry Mountain"
- 10 Streisand's "A Star is ____"
- 14 Baltic port
- 15 "Hello, ____" (Tibetan musi-

- cal?)
- 16 "Beat it!"
- 17 With 32-Across, a quote from "The Color Purple"
- 19 Lie alongside
- 20 O'Connor of "Xena"
- 21 Part of a fashion name
- 23 Hot time for Colette
- 24 Lure into wrongdoing
- 26 Blimp, for one
- 28 "Lady Sings the Blues" star
- 31 "Later!"
- 32 See 17-Across
- 35 Dry as a bone

- 37 Not nutty as a fruitcake
- 38 Porgy's lady
- 39 Source of the quote, played by Whoopi Goldberg
- 41 Sex toys, e.g.
- 44 Group in a kids' game
- 46 Porter's fuel?
- 47 Head, slangily
- 50 Lacking compassion
- 52 Broadway star Stritch
- 54 That, south of the border
- 55 "The Color Purple" author
- 58 In the extreme
- 60 Words of empathy
- 61 Auto of Pasolini's land
- 62 Ancient European language
- 63 Prejudice and homophobia
- 64 Problem for skin
- 65 Brady Bunch prefix
- 66 George, who was Mary Ann
- 67 Avoids family cooking, with "out"

Down

- 1 Bonheur's brother
- 2 Pep up
- 3 One who often screws actors
- 4 Fruit peeler
- 5 Ill. clock setting
- 6 "If I Were King of the Forest" singer Bert
- 7 Former netman Nastase
- 8 Unexpected help
- 9 In a major way
- 10 Eagle's org.
- 11 Austin Powers catchphrase
- 12 Bits by Cho, e.g.
- 13 What stenos scratch on

- 18 Long
- 22 Shrinking sea
- 25 Honey holders
- 27 Some A-List gays
- 29 Without a date
- 30 Type of boom
- 32 Untamed stallion, for one
- 33 Farewell to fifty million Frenchmen
- 34 Kiss from Kahlo
- 35 Attains
- 36 Stick it back in
- 40 "The gay ____ Bombeck" (Michael Thomas Ford nickname)
- 42 "A hard man is good to find" quipster
- 43 Spicy stew
- 45 Salty tasting
- 47 La Femme of espionage
- 48 Like a short one on Broadway
- 49 Cruising quarters
- 51 Actor Williamson
- 53 Jude Law title role
- 56 "____ Get a Witness" (Marvin Gaye)
- 57 Ending with switch
- 59 Affirmative for Gomer

See p. 21 for answers



Shop LGBTQ+

PRIDESOURCE.COM



HIV IS NOT THE END. BE EMPOWERED!

ACCESS RESOURCES AT MATRIXHUMANSERVICES.ORG



- Transfer your prescriptions today
- Specializing in providing world class HIV pharmaceutical care
- Free HIV Testing
- Pickup free at home HIV testing kits
- Free Syphilis testing
- Blister Packaging Available
- Free Delivery!



Toll-Free Available 24 Hours/Day: **1-800-381-7518**
www.crownpharmacy.com



24401 Plymouth Rd, Redford, MI 48239

313-532-DRUG (3784)

CrownPharmacy1@aol.com

Hours: M-F 9:00 AM - 5:00 PM | Closed Weekends and Holidays

◀ Where Are They Now

Continued from page 14

because I grew up in Detroit. I love my city and was so touched to be honored.

How do you think your own identity influenced your desire to help other LGBTQ+ Michiganders?

I have always been inclined toward fundraising for a cause. As a child, I would go door-to-door during the Labor Day Muscular Dystrophy Telethon and raise money to help. In junior high, I raised more money than anyone else in the candy sales for the American Youth Hostel program. In grade school, I was president of the Future Teachers Association. In addition to raising money, I liked to volunteer and tended to seek out leadership roles.

It was a natural path that when I came out, I was going to get involved. However, I never imagined when I walked into Affirmations in 1992, scared out of my mind, that I would end up where I did. But I loved the community I found there. And after attending the 1993 March on Washington, I had the courage to come out and begin to fight for what was right for the LGBTQ+ community... my community. I realized that if I could come from wanting to kill myself after my first relationship with a same-gender partner to running one of the 10 largest LGBTQ+ organizations in the country, other people could make a similar journey. They just needed a place. They just needed some people. They just needed some love and respect.

Where are you now?

Cindy and I are still in Asheville. We are currently helping our Asheville community recover from a hurricane, something we never expected in the mountains. For the last several years, we have been volunteering with our local Habitat for Humanity. Their ReStore has the second largest sales in the country and they lost nearly everything in the hurricane. After three months of rebuilding the 15,000-square-foot interior, we will be reopening in late January. We also serve on the WomBAT (Women Building Assistance Team) committee. Each year, we raise the money and swing the hammer to build a home for a local family. I have successfully avoided taking a leadership role in any of the organizations we are involved with [laughs].

We have also become involved with the Campaign for Southern Equality, volunteering at events for LGBTQ+ folks and doing things like stuffing backpacks for transgender youth in the southeast United States. I was involved in politics until the most recent election. I have now chosen to be blissfully ignorant as we plan new trips around the world and the country. In 2024, we traveled to Detroit for Lions playoff games, Palm Springs, Panama, Costa Rica, Olive Hill, Tennessee and the Upper Peninsula for Cindy's 50th high school reunion.

Speaking of the Lions...after 67 years of being fans, we were thrilled to see our Lions doing so well. We have been traveling to games and love, love, love coming home to Detroit. Just a few weeks ago we spent a few days in downtown Detroit, enjoying the Christmas Markets and all the shops along Woodward. I had so much pride in my city.



**Delivered
Straight to
Your Mailbox**

Support LGBTQ+ journalism and get *Between the Lines* delivered to your door for just \$95/year or \$10/month.

WWW.PRIDESOURCE.COM/SUBSCRIBE

NEW LIBRARY CARD DESIGNS



ANN ARBOR DISTRICT LIBRARY

GET YOURS AT ANY OF
AADL'S FIVE LIBRARIES TODAY!

MERITHOT

CREATE
SOMETHING
EXTRAORDINARY.

Merithot helps awesome companies create remarkable brands, strategies, websites and content.

Creative Marketing made with ♥ from Ann Arbor, MI

www.merithot.com

Supporting the
Community Since
Before it was Cool.

100% Local Agents. 100% Client Focused.
Trillium Real Estate Helps People
Make Good Decisions.



Sandi & Linda
www.trilliumrealtors.com

944 N Main St, Ann Arbor, MI 48104
734-302-3011



There are enough things out there going viral.



Get your COVID-19 and flu vaccines.

Help keep your immune system from going viral. Talk to your health care provider.

Michigan.gov/COVIDFluRSV

